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REPORT ON THE PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF MASSACHUSETTS.

BY

ANDREW McFARLAND DAVIS.

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(From First Report of Public Archives Commission in the Annual Report of the  
American Historical Association for 1900, Vol. II, pages 47-59.)

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## REPORT ON THE PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF MASSACHUSETTS.<sup>1</sup>

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The vast amount of material in the Massachusetts archives and the great number of the publications of the government in the days of the colony, the province, and the State forbid any attempt in a preliminary report to do more with reference to the archives than to indicate in a general way the nature of their contents and to name the publications in which they have been most thoroughly described. As to the published laws, reports, addresses, etc., a monograph which should adequately describe them might be swelled until it covered volumes in extent. For the present purpose, however, it will suffice to point out where the most complete published list of these publications can be found, and describe the present custom of the State in regard to the custody of its papers and the publication of its annual reports and proceedings.

The constitution of the State provides that the records of the Commonwealth shall be kept in the office of the secretary; hence what is now known as the archives division is in the department of that officer. The papers which to-day of necessity find their way into the custody of the secretary are, first, those which originate in his office, of which there are several branches; second, the acts and resolves, which are engrossed upon parchment in the secretary's office and bound in volumes; and, third, the legislative papers, such as petitions, proceedings before committees, and, in a general way, all records and papers which mark the progress of legislative action. These latter remain in the custody of the clerks of the senate and house until the completion

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<sup>1</sup> For references to other accounts of the archives of Massachusetts see the "List of printed indices to and descriptions of archives and other repositories of historical manuscript" in the First Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission (Report of the American Historical Association, 1896, Vol. I, pp. 488, 489, 496-501).

of the session of the legislature next succeeding that at which they derived their origin. The secretary being himself *ex officio* the clerk of the council, the papers of the council in executive session are presumably in his custody all the time and are deposited in the archives as soon as they cease to have current importance.

It will be seen that, so far as the papers of the Commonwealth are concerned which are not covered by the clause of the constitution which makes the secretary the custodian of the records, no obligation rests with the heads of the several departments to surrender them to the archives when they cease to be of current importance in the office where they originated. There seems to be no rule by which it can be determined whether such papers are of more than mere historical interest, and by custom the several departments retain possession of their own papers as long as they choose to do so.

Although it will be seen that the papers in custody of the secretary cover, in their chronological sequence, a period extending from the beginning of the colony down to the present time, still the great mass of papers generally cited as the "Massachusetts Archives" are mainly of ante-Revolutionary date. They were arranged by Joseph B. Felt, between 1836 and 1846, and were by him classified under 76 different topical headings and bound in 242 volumes. The Hutchinson papers, subsequently acquired, added two more volumes to the set and one more heading to the classification. The attempt at classifying these papers under topical headings has been the source of much criticism on the part of historical students, but it is generally conceded that the numerous citations of the volumes as they now stand is a serious obstacle to any proposition for rearranging the papers in chronological order. The nearest approach to a remedy would apparently be a calendar or complete chronological index of the volumes. There is already in existence an index which is of assistance to students, but it could be greatly improved upon.

Besides the papers arranged by Mr. Felt, there are many others in the archives. Some of these have been subsequently acquired, and some have been assorted, arranged,

and bound in volumes by the present keeper of the archives. Much work has also been done in the way of opening up the contents of certain classes of these papers through suitable indexes, but it would be impossible in this report to go into particulars upon this subject, the work of describing these papers in detail having already been well done in a report which will be described later.

The archives room contains not only the papers above referred to, but also the manuscript records of the colonial and provincial period. The records of the general court in the days of the colony have been published. There is one volume of what are termed "council records," covering the period 1650-1656, which has not been published. The original records of the council under the presidency of Dudley and his successor, Andros, were not preserved, but transcripts of the copies of the records which were forwarded to London have been procured from the London State Paper Office. These records have not been published by the State, but those covering the period of Dudley's presidency were copied by Mr. Robert Nixon Toppan and by him communicated to the Massachusetts Historical Society, thus securing their publication in the proceedings of that society (Vol. XIII, pp. 226, 286). The American Antiquarian Society possesses the original minutes, in manuscript, made by Edward Randolph, of the council meetings, December 20, 1686, to April 25, 1687, inclusive. These were copied by Mr. Toppan and communicated to that society. Copies were also communicated at the same time of such of the council records during the remainder of Andros's administration as are to be found in the archives. This collection was further enriched by the addition of the records of meetings of the council published in the records of the colony of Connecticut, and by notes showing the differences which exist between Randolph's original minutes and the transcripts in the archives. In this form the records during the presidency of Andros were published in the proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, Volume XIII, new series, pages 239-268, 463, 499, thus covering, from different sources, the entire period.

Subsequent to the last of the Andros records, there are to

to found in manuscript in the archives room the records of the council in executive session during the provincial period, classified as the "council records," and the legislative records of that body during the same time, known generally, through Felt's ascription, as the "court records." These have never been published as records. The contemporary publication of the laws of the province of course reveals the most important part of their contents.

Beginning in 1715, the house journal was thereafter regularly published in the days of the province by the representatives. The earlier copies are rare, and there is no single set of the published journals which is complete, but it is probable that from all the known copies a complete set could be collated.

Manuscript copies of the records of Plymouth Colony are in the archives. So far as the records themselves are concerned, they have been published. The originals are at Plymouth.

The only publication of the State of Massachusetts which has undertaken to deal with the hitherto-unpublished portions of the provincial records is the set known as the "Acts and Resolves of the Province of Massachusetts Bay," now in press. Until 1896 this publication was edited by Abner C. Goodell, perhaps the most competent man in the Commonwealth for the purpose, and it was his effort to print not only everything of a legislative character in these records, but also all resolves, whatever their nature. He divided the subject into public laws, private laws, and resolves. The public laws were published in five volumes, with copious annotations, mainly from the archives and the London record office. The sixth volume was set aside for the private laws, and was not published in chronological sequence. The publication of the resolves began in volume 7, and was carried down to the year 1707 in volume 8, these two volumes being annotated in the same way as the public laws had been. While work was going on in 1896 simultaneously on volume 6 and volume 9, it was discovered that the method of annotation was not authorized by the law under which these acts and resolves were being published, and Mr. Goodell was



instructed to print volume 6 at once with marginal references instead of with notes in full. After this was done the work of publication was suspended. In the spring of 1900 work was resumed under the editorship of Melville M. Bigelow, the system prescribed for volume 6 being that laid down for future guidance in publishing the resolves.

In 1884 a commission was appointed to report in print what steps, if any, should be taken to render the contents of the records, files, papers, and documents in the state department more accessible for examination and inspection, how reference to the same might be best facilitated, and what would be the proper mode of indexing them. The then secretary of state was ex officio placed at the head of this commission, but the working force was a remarkably strong body of representative men interested in historical work. Conspicuous among them was Justin Winsor, whose work upon the Memorial History of Boston and the Narrative and Critical History of America, the latter being then in process of publication, had made him familiar with the defects of the archives. The report submitted by this committee was probably shaped by him. It gives a concise but clear description of the contents of the archives and of their condition, points out the defects in the original system of classification, and makes certain suggestions as to the enlargement and improvement of the system of indexing. It would be difficult to overestimate the value of this document to the student who desires to ascertain the contents of the archives.

The following account of changes in the arrangement and condition of the archives since 1885, and particularly since 1891, is furnished by Mr. James J. Tracy, chief of the archives division:

“No practical result followed upon the recommendations made in the report for several years beyond securing an annual appropriation for the care and preservation of the archives; but upon the advent into office of the present secretary of the Commonwealth, Hon. William M. Olin, in 1891, measures were at once taken to improve the condition of affairs with reference to the records and follow out some of the suggestions made by the commissioners. There is no

question that more has been accomplished in this direction during his incumbency than during that of any previous secretary.

“The department containing the records and the clerks engaged upon that special work have been separated from the clerical force carrying on the routine work of the secretary’s office and established as a separate division, known as the ‘archives division,’ and no small part of the credit of what has been accomplished is due to this recognition of the value and importance of the records themselves and of the work in connection with them.

“Fifteen years ago one old man represented practically all the working force engaged upon the records and also embodied all the office knowledge concerning them. To-day there are a dozen clerks employed in the archives division alone, and these are under a responsible head who in turn is answerable to and under the direction of the secretary of the Commonwealth.

“The above facts are stated merely to show the changed attitude of officials toward the records, which in turn is but a reflection of the change that has taken place in public opinion concerning them.

“The work carried on has been of the most varied character, comprising classification, arranging, copying, and indexing the records, proof reading, publishing, repairing and binding, making searches, supplying certified copies to inquirers, etc.

“A fair idea of what has been done may be gathered from the following statement of the changes in arrangement of documents since the publication of the commissioners’ report, and of the work directly carried out for the benefit of the public consulting the records:

“The collection of manuscript documents known as the ‘Felt collection,’ and usually referred to for purposes of reference as ‘Massachusetts Archives,’ remains unchanged, but there have been added to it 77 volumes of similar size and uniform binding, which practically constitute so much of an extension of the Felt collection. These volumes are made up of the contents of the various loose files and bundles of papers mentioned in the report of the commissioners, pages 23, 36, and 38.

“The Revolutionary rolls collection has been augmented by the addition of 16 volumes, made up of rolls, company order books, etc., and of some rolls acquired by purchase, so that the Revolutionary collection now numbers in all 97 bound volumes.

“A record index containing the abstracted references to every individual in this collection, numbering about 700,000 record cards, has been compiled, and this record index is preserved here for the benefit of the persons desiring to find proof of military service of ancestors, the office being continually burdened with these inquiries. In addition, this same record index serves as the basis for the official publication entitled ‘Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the War of the Revolution,’ the entire work of proof reading, editing, etc., being carried on in the office. Seven volumes of this publication, averaging 1,000 pages to each volume, have already been issued, and the eighth volume is now nearly through the press. These eight volumes will comprise all names, with accompanying records, between A and J, inclusive, that appear in the State’s collection of Revolutionary rolls.

“A similar record index has been compiled for the muster-rolls series, covering the various military records between 1710–1774, numbering about 150,000 record cards.

“It is possible, therefore, to obtain the military record of any individual without difficulty, and without consulting the original volumes, from 1710 to the close of the war of the Revolution.

“Later on the legislature may authorize the publication of the earlier military records in style similar to the Revolutionary war publication.

“It is the intention also to index in similar fashion such military records as are scattered through the archives collection, of whatever sort or nature, between 1628 and 1710; but as these earlier records are meager in quantity and amount, and must be sought for through a number of scattered volumes, that work will be taken up from time to time, as the freedom of the clerks from other employment may enable it to be done.

“Various maps and plans, comprising the State survey in 1794, the State survey in 1830, and all miscellaneous plans

heretofore resting in files or upon rollers and in separated groups, have been brought together, making a collection of 101 volumes, suitably mounted and bound, which collection has been duly catalogued and indexed, so that it is possible to find any given town plan or plan of an early grant without difficulty.

“The five volumes of ancient plans and grants referred to on page 16 of the commissioners’ report have been broken up, the plans going into the maps and plan collection, while the descriptive text that formerly accompanied them has been bound into one volume.

“The returns of vital statistics, which were formerly in a separate department, have now been consolidated with the archives division, and a card reference index, covering the entire collection of records, but in five-year periods, has been made, the reference indexes being kept up annually as the returns are deposited in this office.

“A certain amount of work has been done each year in the direction of mounting, binding, and preserving the documents. as the need manifests itself, the whole muster rolls collection, 1710–1774, and the Revolutionary rolls collection, having been treated in the most approved fashion, so that they may be said to be now in fine condition.

“The foregoing comprise most of the changes in arrangement that have taken place since the publication of the commissioners’ report, but the account does not give any idea of the greatly improved condition of the records and documents as regards their disposition in files and cases—a work which it was possible to accomplish when the archives division was given improved quarters in the new statehouse addition.

“The files now for any given group or series of records are kept in juxtaposition with the book records or volumes containing references to files. The other groupings and series of records and documents, that is, council records, council files, bills, resolves, house papers and senate papers have the same general arrangement and increase from year to year with the growth of the executive and legislative business.

“In conclusion, I would state that the condition of the archives collection, and the attention paid to it, as well as

the methods employed in its conduct, are entirely creditable to the Commonwealth, with the single exception, in my own opinion, that insufficient room for the extension and expansion of the division and the safe keeping of the records was allowed in the original assignment of quarters. The end of the filing and storing capacity is already in sight, so that it will be a serious matter in a few years to find room to take care of the annual records deposited here, as well as the old records.

“The space required for the work of the force renders the accommodation that is available for visitors to the division desiring to consult the records altogether less than it should be, or than I desire, as I should prefer to have the clerical force and visitors entirely separate.

“These latter defects, however, can neither be helped nor avoided now, but it is to be hoped that later on additional accommodations or better quarters, designed in the first instance for a department of records, may be secured either in a new department building or in some other part of the present State House.”

The best finding list of the publications of Massachusetts, whether colonial, provincial, or State, is that contained in Mr. R. R. Bowker's "State Publications," Part I (New York, 1899). The Massachusetts list was compiled, under the direction of Mr. C. B. Tillinghast, State librarian, by Miss E. M. Sawyer, one of his assistants. Mr. Tillinghast has taken especial pains to make the collection of books under his care as complete as possible, particularly in the direction of publications of the colony, the province, and the State, and this finding list represents what has been gathered in the State library after years of labor.

Massachusetts has a commissioner of public records, whose efforts are put forth to secure the permanence of public records through the use of suitable paper and ink and by compelling their deposit in places where they will be protected from fire. There is an abundance of legislation on the statute books tending in this direction, but, if we may judge from the reports of the commissioner, the subject has, until recently, attracted but little attention, and many valuable records have been scattered about in unsafe places and

in a shiftless and desultory manner. The persistent work of the commissioner tends, however, to awaken a sense of responsibility upon the part of the custodians of these records, and there can be no doubt not only that the condition of things has improved, but that there is reason to hope for further improvement in the future.

In January, 1897, Mr. John Noble, clerk of the supreme court for the county of Suffolk, in a communication to the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, described what he there terms "the early court files of Suffolk County." The paper is printed in volume 3 of the publications of the society, pages 317 et seq. The entire collection referred to by Mr. Noble contains not far from half a million papers, and, when bound, will fill from 1,100 to 1,200 folio volumes. Chance divided this collection into two parts, one of which, until recently in the custody of the superior court, has had a precarious career, having been stored in various places and subject to many vicissitudes, while the other has remained continuously in the charge of the clerk of the supreme court, and has retained practically its original file arrangement. The period covered by the collection runs from 1629 to 1800. As showing the historical value of the papers, Mr. Noble calls attention to the fact that "through the colonial period the assistants appear to have exercised all the three functions of government—judicial, legislative, and executive—to a greater or less degree. At the outset and in the early years all these powers seem to have been vested in the magistrates sitting as a court of assistants, and it was only gradually that the separation of the government into different branches took place." A working index of these papers, "giving the titles of the cases and the principal matter in each case or number, contained in some thirty volumes, has been made, and a more thorough and exhaustive analytical calendar, supplemented by a classified index of every name, place, and subject, is now in progress."

The fact that this great mass of legal papers contains so much matter that is of historical importance and the fortunate circumstance that so large a proportion of the legal proceedings of the colony and province are to be found in this one collection will not relieve the student from the necessity of considering the contents of the county and pro-

bate files. Many of these are rich in material of historical interest, which, in States where the resources of this class are more limited, would very likely be gathered into the archives department of the State. So, too, the records of the churches, especially during the days when they were maintained by public taxation, are public records, and their custody might well be the same as that of other public documents. Much effort has been put forth by the commissioner of public records in searching for the whereabouts of records of this class and in endeavoring to secure their proper treatment. A card index of names and services in the Revolutionary war has been prepared and is in process of publication. A similar card index has also been prepared of names and services in the French and Indian wars. An index has also been prepared to the vital statistics.

The secretary of state issues annually a list of the public documents which he is by law required to have printed. A copy of the list for 1901, containing, besides the titles of the documents, the figures showing the number of copies in the regular edition of each and the date when each is due, is appended to this report.

*List of public documents, etc., for 1901, required to be printed by the secretary of state.*<sup>1</sup>

No.	Title.	Regular edition.	When due.
1	Registration of Births, Marriages, and Deaths.	2, 000	As soon as compiled.
2	Board of Education, Report of Secretary.	5, 000	Third Wednesday in January.
3	Librarian of State Library, Report . . . . .	1, 500	15th day of October.
4	Board of Agriculture, Report of Secretary. <sup>2</sup>	15, 000	Fourth Wednesday in January.
5	Treasurer and Receiver-General, Report.	1, 900	First Wednesday in January.
6	Auditor of Accounts, Report . . . . .	1, 500	Jan. 15.
7	Adjutant-General, Report . . . . .	2, 000	First Wednesday in January.
8	Savings Bank Commissioners, Report: <sup>3</sup>		
	Part I . . . . .	2, 500	Do.
	Part II . . . . .	2, 000	Do.
9	Insurance Commissioner, Report: <sup>4</sup>		
	Fire and Marine . . . . .	2, 500	As soon as returns are received.
	Life <sup>5</sup> . . . . .	4, 000	Do.

<sup>1</sup> Printed in accordance with Laws of 1890, chaps. 223 and 347; Laws of 1894, chap. 393; Laws of 1895, chaps. 54, 96, 463, and 488; Laws of 1896, chaps. 86, 189, 221, and 223; Laws of 1897, chap. 141 and res. 95; Laws of 1898, chaps. 175, 320, 433, and res. 24; Laws of 1899, chaps. 309 and 336; Laws of 1900, chaps. 225 and 386.

<sup>2</sup> To include No. 33.

<sup>3</sup> May make supplementary report of unclaimed deposits. (1887, 319, § 2.)

<sup>4</sup> 1,500 copies of that part which relates to "fraternal beneficiary corporations," and 500 copies of the part entitled "texts and tables," to be printed separately and bound in pamphlet form. (1900, 386.)

<sup>5</sup> 500 for use of the commissioner.

List of public documents, etc., for 1901, required to be printed by the secretary of state<sup>1</sup>—Continued.

No.	Title.	Regular edition.	When due.
10	Corporations, Abstract of Returns.....	2,500	First Wednesday in January.
11	Harbor and Land Commissioners, Report	2,000	10th day of January.
12	Attorney-General, Report.....	2,500	As soon as made up.
13	Commissioners of Prisons, Report.....	2,000	First week in January.
	The part referring to the reformatory prison for women. <sup>1</sup>	500	Do.
	The part referring to the State prison. <sup>2</sup>	500	Do.
	The part referring to the agent for discharged convicts. <sup>3</sup>	250	Do.
	The part referring to the Massachusetts reformatory. <sup>1</sup>	500	Do.
14	Railroad Commissioners, Report:		
	With returns.....	2,000	First Wednesday in January.
	Without returns.....	2,250	Do.
15	Bureau of Statistics of Labor, Report....	6,000	1st day of March.
	In parts.....	1,000	Do.
16	Tax Commissioner, Report.....	2,000	Annually at close of year.
17	State Board of Charity, Report <sup>4</sup> .....	2,000	31st day of December.
18	State Lyman and Industrial Schools, Report of Trustees.	2,000	15th day of October.
19	Polls, Property, and Taxes, Aggregates of	1,500	First Wednesday in January.
20	Danvers Lunatic Hospital, Report of Trustees.	2,000	15th day of October.
21	Northampton Lunatic Hospital, Report of Trustees.	2,000	Do.
22	Taunton Lunatic Hospital, Report of Trustees.	2,000	Do.
23	Worcester Lunatic Hospital, Report of Trustees. <sup>5</sup>	2,000	Do.
24	State Farm at Bridgewater, Report of Trustees.	2,500	Do.
25	Commissioners on Inland Fisheries and Game, Report.	2,000	Do.
26	State Hospital, Report of Trustees.....	2,500	Do.
27	Perkins Institute and Massachusetts School for the Blind, Report of Trustees.	1,250	Do.
28	Massachusetts School for the Feeble-minded, Report of Trustees.	1,500	Do.
29	Controller of County Accounts, Report <sup>6</sup> .	1,500	1st day of February.
30	Westborough Insane Hospital, Report of Trustees.	2,000	15th day of October.
31	Massachusetts Agricultural College, Report of Trustees. <sup>7</sup>	5,000	Fourth Wednesday in January.
32	Chief of the District Police, Report....	2,500	1st day of January.
33	Hatch Experiment Station of the Massachusetts Agricultural College, Report. <sup>8</sup>	25,000	In January.
34	State Board of Health, Report.....	5,000	31st day of December.
35	Gas and Electric Light Commissioners, Report and Abstract of Returns.	3,500	First Wednesday in January.
36	Statistics of Manufactures.....	5,000	Time not fixed.
	In parts.....	1,000	Do.

<sup>1</sup> For the superintendent.

<sup>2</sup> For the warden.

<sup>3</sup> For the agent.

<sup>4</sup> 500 copies of so much as relates to almshouses, etc., to be printed for the use of the board. (1898, 320.)

<sup>5</sup> Includes Worcester Insane Asylum; 400 of each institution, viz., Worcester Lunatic Hospital and the Worcester Insane Asylum, bound separate with distinct title, for use of trustees. The remainder have a general title.

<sup>6</sup> 500 for use of the controller.

<sup>7</sup> 3,500 for use of the college.

<sup>8</sup> 15,000 to be bound with No. 4 and 8,000 for use of the trustees.



List of public documents, etc., for 1901, required to be printed by the secretary of state<sup>1</sup>—Continued.

No.	Title.	Regular edition.	When due.
37	Report of Cases of Contested Elections..	1, 500	At close of session of legislature.
38	Board of Registration in Dentistry, Report.	2, 500	31st day of December.
39	Board of Registration in Pharmacy, Report.	1, 500	1st day of January.
40	Board of Arbitration and Conciliation, Report.	<sup>2</sup> 2, 000	1st day of February.
41	General Superintendent of Prisons, Report.	1, 500	Annually in December.
42	Commissioners of the Nautical Training School, Report.	1, 500	In January.
43	Assessed Polls, Registered Voters, etc., Return of.	2, 500	1st day of February.
44	Board of Free Public Library Commissioners, Report.	2, 000	Annually in January.
45	Board of Metropolitan Sewerage Commissioners, Report.	3, 000	Time not fixed.
46	Secretary of the Commonwealth, Report	1, 500	Annually in January.
47	Massachusetts Hospital for Dipsomaniacs and Inebriates, Report of Trustees.	2, 000	15th day of October.
48	Metropolitan Park Commission, Report..	4, 000	Second Wednesday in December.
49	Board of Police, City of Boston, Report.	1, 500	Annually in December.
50	Commissioners on Topographical Survey and Map, Report.	1, 500	15th day of October.
51	Board of Cattle Commissioners, Report.	<sup>3</sup> 1, 500	10th day of January.
52	Commissioner of Public Records, Report.	2, 000	Annually in January.
53	Civil Service Commission, Report .....	10, 000	10th day of January.
54	Highway Commission, Report.....	4, 000	First Wednesday in January.
55	Inspector of Gas and Gas Meters, Report.	1, 500	Annually in January.
56	Board of Registration in Medicine, Report.	<sup>4</sup> 3, 500	1st day of January.
57	Metropolitan Water Board, Report.....	4, 500	First Wednesday in January.
58	Board of Police, City of Fall River, Report.	1, 500	Annually in December.
59	Medfield Insane Asylum, Report of Trustees.	1, 500	15th day of October.
60	State Dairy Bureau, Report.....	1, 500	15th day of January.
61	Massachusetts State Sanatorium, Report of Trustees.	1, 500	After annual meeting.
62	Massachusetts Hospital for Epileptics, Report of Trustees.	1, 500	Do.
63	State Board of Insanity, Report.....	2, 000	31st day of December.
64	Commissioners of the Firemen's Relief Fund, Report.	1, 500	Time not fixed.
	Manual for the general court.....	10, 000	
	Blue Book.....	12, 000	
	Pamphlet edition of laws and resolves..	25, 000	
	Journals of the senate and house of representatives.	1, 000	
	List of members and committees of the two branches.	1, 200	
	Book containing rules of the two branches, notes of rulings of presiding officers, list of members and committees, for pocket use.	<sup>5</sup> 700	
	Governor's address .....	<sup>6</sup> 2, 000	

<sup>1</sup> 500 for use of legislature.

<sup>2</sup> 700 for use of the board.

<sup>3</sup> 400 for the use of the board.

<sup>4</sup> 2,500 for the use of the board.

<sup>5</sup> 350 in memorandum book form.

<sup>6</sup> 900 for use of legislature, and 500 for personal use of the governor.





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